

VZCZCXRO4492
PP RUEHPA
DE RUEHFN #0325/01 2291654
ZNY SSSS ZZH
P 171654Z AUG 09
FM AMEMBASSY FREETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2830
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 FREETOWN 000325

NOFORN
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W - JIM HUNTER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/17/2019
TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR SL
SUBJECT: DIPLOMATIC CORPS VIEWS: CRY ME A RIVER

REF: A. FREETOWN 266
1B. FREETOWN 280
1C. FREETOWN 309
1D. FREETOWN 323
1E. IIR 0309

Classified By: Ambassador June Carter Perry for Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary: Through mainly one-on-one meetings over the past two weeks with Western, African and Middle Eastern envoys, plus the United Nations, Ambassador has detected both a desire to support Sierra Leone's stated goals and a frustration that to do so is difficult. President Koroma's laudable principles expressed in his "agenda for change" (anti-corruption, focus on energy and agricultural development) are difficult to implement. The Head of State's overly friendly approach to Guinea's junta leader, the government's reversal of its promise to the UN to establish a public broadcasting system with international community funding and deeply-embedded corruption in the military leadership have led to disappointment and a hardening of stances by diplomatic missions. Simultaneously, resident representatives wish to support needed capacity-building, education, anti-corruption and anti-drug efforts but are finding more of their time spent steering government officials toward good governance and deeper understanding of international repercussions if thorny issues are not addressed. Protection of U.S. interests in Sierra Leone lies in long-term capacity building and constant reinforcement of good governance principles. End Summary.

12. (C) During an August 12 farewell we hosted at the CMR for Egyptian Ambassador Mohmound Ezzat, the UN's Executive Representative of the Secretary General, Michael von der Schulenburg, bemoaned the Government of Sierra Leone's "betrayal" of its promise in a communique signed by Koroma and brokered by the international community to convert its party-run radio system to an open, non-political voice. Despite the President's public agreement to follow through, his Information Minister (Ibrahim Kargbo) announced the establishment of a state-run system, contrary in spirit and fact to the agreement. The UN has sent a letter to the government indicating it cannot now turn over its own UN Radio nor provide the USD 850,000 in Peace Building funds to Sierra Leone to start a station. The government has not yet responded to the UN's concerns.

13. (C) In a similar vein, following U.S., UK and UN recommendations not to meet with Guinea's illegitimate and unstable coup leader, Dadis Camara, Koroma did so (ref B). The GoSL then went beyond its "technical team" talks concerning the disputed 10 mile Yenga border area with Guinea. Koroma, decked out in military garb, unexpectedly met with the team, and issued a two page statement attesting a "brotherly" relationship with Camara and hailing the importance of the two countries' warm relationship (ref C). In a private discussion August 7 with U.K. High Commissioner Ian Hughes, Ambassador learned that even the British (who

consider the Sierra Leonean leaders to be naive) were surprised Koroma had gone so far. While holding to their views that the GoSL does not appreciate the impact of its actions and statements on key development partners, the UK envoy argued the Western group must try to steer the GoSL in the right direction: avoid condoning Camara and focus on supporting elections in Guinea. We have heard from a reliable source that the Nigerian High Commissioner and ECOWAS have tacitly given Koroma "wiggle room" despite ECOWAS's own public position that Dadis is an illegitimate "leader."

¶4. (S/NF) Our own internal reporting (ref A) and sources have revealed deep corruption within the Defense Ministry primarily through pocketing of enlisted members' salaries (including those destined for peacekeeping operations (ref E)). The British envoy revealed that the GoSL demanded a \$4 million contribution from the UK for the Ministry of Defense to support peacekeeping. Upon examination, the British discovered that half of the funds were for the personal use of the Minister (Palo Conteh) and top brass. Items such as 36 plasma TVs and hunting rifles for the Minister's own use were included. Although told to cut the budget by half by the UK's mission, it took a call from London to Koroma to carry home the point. We believe Koroma is willing to keep Conteh content by any means necessary because he realizes a disgruntled army could unseat him. Furthermore, the Anti-Corruption Commissioner is said to be considering other positions in the U.S. or the UK due to his own frustration. This factor, though unspoken, was reinforced in our August 13 talk with third party leader, Charles Margai, who alleged the Commissioner had fingered four Ministers and one Deputy for

FREETOWN 00000325 002 OF 002

investigation; the President reportedly instructed him not to proceed (ref D). It is our analysis that Conteh was certainly among the four, with Information Minister Kargbo number two. The Deputy Minister of Finance was likely among the group along with the Health Minister (now under some scrutiny for siphoning contracting funds). The fourth is unclear, but Minister of Mining Resources Alpha Kanu, who is pressing for revitalizing the diamond industry, is suspect. Haja Afsatu Kabba, the Minister of Marine Resources, was the target of a corruption probe when she was the Minister of Energy, and according to sources remains under investigation in her current position.

¶5. (C) In the midst of the corruption swirl, the GoSL has hosted a lavish "African Caucus" (septel to follow) for Ministers of Finance and Bank Governors across Africa. Bretton Woods institution representatives from Washington and international monetary experts flooded Freetown August 11-14. During opening and closing ceremonies, we obtained two details of interest from the Guinean Ambassador (Dip Corps Dean) and the departing Egyptian Ambassador. Ambassador Sompore of Guinea made it a point to tell me the "people of Guinea" were unhappy with Dadis and wanted elections soon, although they feared these would not take place. The Egyptian, who planned to leave for Cairo August 17, complained that his request for a farewell call on Koroma was still pending two days before his departure.

¶6. (S) Comment: The GoSL appears to be playing all sides: trying to placate Dadis; "rebranding" Sierra Leone via large, public conferences; saying the right things about corruption and tolerating abuses for fear of failure and threats to the Presidency. The combination of high-mindedness but lack of spine is lessening the international community's hope that Ernest Koroma can stand up to the negative forces around him, especially as eyes turn toward the 2012 elections. U.S. interests remain in capacity-building as an element of stability and security in this fragile region. On-going training and grants in good governance, gender equity, a military under civilian rule and repeated anti-corruption exercises are central to protecting our own security interests in Sierra Leone and the Mano River Basin as a

whole. End Comment.
PERRY